

Communication tools and techniques

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Principles of effective email writing



Email has long been the primary method of communication for many people in business, yet messages are easy to misunderstand or ignore. In this reading, we will discuss four principles of effective email writing that will help your emails to stand out, be remembered, and elicit the response you need. These principles are:

- State what you want clearly.
- Keep the content short and concise.
- Structure your writing.
- Check grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Principles of effective email writing

State what you want clearly

When you set out to compose an email, it is because there is something that you want from your reader. You might want to receive a simple answer, to persuade someone of something, or to arrange a meeting. Before composing an email, think about what you want, when you need what you want, and the best way to get what you want when you want it.

Here are some tips on how to clearly state what you want in your email:

- Include your request in the subject line of your email.
- State your request within the first two paragraphs of your email message.
- Indicate the specific call-to-action associated with your request (for example, reply, review, RSVP).
- Write clear, concise sentences when providing details.
- Define terms. Avoid using acronyms and terminology that users may not know. Provide additional information as necessary to avoid misunderstanding.

Keep the content concise

Make your words work for you. Remove any writing that doesn't help to define what you want or contribute to your reader's needs.

- Summarize the content you want to convey, and remove anything in your email that doesn't contribute to your goal.
- Aim to write "question-less" and "self-standing" emails. This means that the message contains enough information to stand on its own. The reader shouldn't have any questions about what you want and when you want it.
- Know your audience. Some people—such as executives and other busy leadership—may not want to read emails of more than a few sentences or click on external links for further information. Try to tailor your emails accordingly.

Structure your writing

Structure has to do with the visual flow, or aesthetics, of your email. A well-structured email conveys critical information to the reader quickly and allows them to scan the explanatory text—or ignore it altogether. Here are some tips for effectively structuring your email:

- **Use bullets.** Bullets break up the visual flow. If you have more than one of something, consider using bullets. Write strong action verbs at the start of each bullet.
- **Use labels.** Labels help guide the reader to what information is most important.
- **Add hyperlinks.** Hyperlinks allow readers to directly access additional information, rather than adding lengthy details to your email.
- **Write a strong topic sentence.** Place the main idea of the paragraph in the topic sentence.

Check grammar, punctuation, and spelling

Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are critical. Turning grammar and spelling suggestions on in your email application can help you quickly identify errors. Be sure to correct any errors before sending off.

Applying effective email writing principles

In order to learn how to apply these principles, let's check out the following example email:

Issac was given the task of sending an email about the company's annual team building retreat. *Please note: Blue, underlined text indicates a hyperlink to an external site or document.*

Example 1

Subject : Annual Team Building Retreat - Register Now!

Team,

I am thrilled to invite you all officially to the **2021 Annual Team Building Retreat**. As in previous years, we are taking time out to celebrate and strengthen our team spirit—to learn from each other and to plan for the challenges ahead.

We've got something special planned for this retreat! Beyond the staples of world-class training, fabulous working sessions, and executive presentations, we've also arranged:

An Annual Awards Dinner at the Hotel San Francisco; pre-booked rooms for those who want to stay at the hotel after dinner; and an afternoon at Shoreline Lake with sailing, rowing, and paddle boats available.

We hope you can join us for all three excursions. Don't forget to register and sign up per the instructions on the site.

Our theme this year is Transform. We look forward to sharing a transformational week with you all!

Best,

Issac Soto

This email example is not as effective as it could be. The date and location of the event are not included. The main link Issac wants the reader to click—to register for the event—is buried at the bottom of the email. The other links in the message are also overwhelming because there are so many. There are no bullets or labels to help organize the information. Additionally, there are a few spelling and punctuation errors.

Let's examine how Issac's email could be revised to be more effective.

Example 2

Subject: Annual Team Building Retreat - Register Now!

Team,

I am thrilled to invite you to the 2021 Annual Team Building Retreat, October 13–15 at the Hotel San Francisco. This is an opportunity to celebrate and strengthen our team spirit and to learn from one another as we plan for the challenges ahead. To end the event, we will hold our Annual Awards Dinner.

Sign up now!

- [For the retreat](#)
- [For hotel rooms](#)
- [For lakeside activities](#)

Best,

Issac Soto

In this example, there is a clear, concise description of what the email is about at the very beginning of the email. The dates and location of the event are clearly stated at the beginning of the email. The opening paragraph is directly followed by a label in bold: **Sign up now!** Then, bullet points help set apart the hyperlinks for better visibility, and the hyperlinks clearly state what the reader will access when they click. Lastly, the grammar, spelling, and punctuation are all accurate.

Key takeaway

When you write an email, think about the people you are sending it to and what they need in order to quickly read and correctly understand it. Remember to:

1. State what you want clearly.
2. Keep the content concise.
3. Structure your writing.
4. Check grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Keeping these principles in mind when you draft emails will help you communicate more effectively with your team members, stakeholders, customers, and others. It can also demonstrate your level of professionalism and competence and inspire others' confidence in your abilities.

Mark as completed

